

Michal Friedman



This is me. The photo was taken in Warsaw in 2001. How did it really begin, what made me decide to take up translation? It came out of the fury that would overcome me when reading 'Literatura na Swiecie' [a quarterly], an excellent periodical that published literature of even the tiniest of nations, but failed to notice the great Jewish literature, which was quite literally at hand. Thus, driven actually by rage, especially that this was happening after the expulsion of the last remaining Jews [reference to 1968 and the final wave of emigration of Polish Jews], after I found myself on the street [Michal Friedman had been forced to take early retirement], I proposed to the editor-in-chief of 'Literatura na Swiecie', that I would prepare an issue devoted to Jewish literature. I presented to him fragments of the most famous books by eminent Jewish writers: Sholem Aleichem, Peretz, Mendel Moicher Sforim, Itzik Manger and Kacyzyna. And he accepted. Previously, I had translated Jewish short stories for Folksztyme and some plays for the Jewish Theater. I interpreted from Yiddish into Polish for audiences who listened to the lines on headphones. I enjoyed the thought that through 'Literatura na Swiecie' I would reach the intelligent reader who had no idea what kind of literature the Jews had created in such a short span of time. For indeed, literary Yiddish had just emerged and begun to attain the height of its potential when it was killed. That issue of 'Literatura na Swiecie' [an entire issue in 1984 was devoted to Yiddish literature] was a great success, and right away I was commissioned by the PIW [State Publishing Institute] to translate 'The Book of Paradise': a very witty story, which became a bestseller.